Dampened motivation as a side effect of contemporary educational policy: A self-determination theory perspective

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Abstract

It has been suggested that features of contemporary educational policy create and encourage teaching and learning practices that dampen human motivation. This paper sought to analyse and extend this discussion through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT). Key questions are discussed such as (1) what is human motivation from a self-determination theory perspective, and (2) how and why is it dampened by features of contemporary educational policy? The discussion is then extended to explore the extent to which dampened human motivation from an SDT perspective might be considered unjust if they systematically dampen motivation.

Keywords: Motivation, self-determination, social justice, education

Introduction

Zhao (2017) has suggested that, like medicine, educational research and policy ought to be more alert to side effects. Side effects are essentially unwanted or unexpected by-products that arise from and/or accompany the desired effects of a given intervention or policy. In medical research and practice, Zhao (2017) argues that a comprehensive understanding of the risks and side effects of a given treatment or intervention can be equally important as the positive benefits. Studying, understanding, reporting, and minimising side effects is therefore an ethical issue of the utmost importance.

However, Zhao (2017) goes on to argue that educational research and policy has tended to overlook side effects:

> I have yet not yet found an educational product that comes with a warning label carrying information such as "this program works in raising your students' test scores…but may make them hate reading forever" (p. 2).

We frequently know very little, for example, about whether an educational intervention or policy initiative that is successful in raising standards of attainment is also accompanied by detrimental effects in relation to other aspects of learning and personhood. Zhao (2017) has outlined some of the areas where educational side effects have seemingly been overlooked and where it would have been prudent to try to conceptualise, predict, and better understand possible side effects before pressing ahead with policy initiatives. For example, he has discussed the impact of international educational assessment systems such as PISA on anxiety and psychological wellbeing and the damaging effects of test-based accountability. However, it can be extremely difficult to identify and articulate side effects in education because (a) they may take a long time to be observed or experienced, (b) they may be challenging to measure, evidence, and document, and (c) they may conflict with idolized values and broader political objectives (Zhao, 2017).

In this paper, I seek to discuss, theorise, and articulate the construct of motivation as an educational side-effect. Zhao (2017) and others (e.g., Carr, 2015) have singled out dampened motivation as a side effect of policy shifts towards standardised levels of attainment, performativity, and accountability, and understanding, reporting, and theorising such motivational side effects is a critical scholarly objective. However, it is an objective that cannot be adequately explored without careful consideration of some important issues.

Firstly, if psychological constructs such as motivation are to be effectively positioned as genuine side effects of contemporary educational policy and intervention then it will be critical to have a clear and thorough conceptual and empirical understanding of what motivation is and how it can be considered a side effect. That is, if features of educational intervention and policy have motivational side effects, what are these side effects? What does it mean to say that standardised testing and attainment, or performativity and accountability, dampen motivation? What exactly do they dampen? How do they dampen it? And why does it matter? Such questions speak powerfully to Zhao's (2017) call for careful consideration of educational side effects. To this end, motivational theories offers us a lens and a language through which we might better understand and articulate the sorts of motivational side effects that could be a consequence of features of educational policy and intervention.

Secondly, there are important distinctions to be made when *motivation* is positioned as a side effect, especially when compared, for example, to medical side effects. Dampened motivation as a by-product of certain educational initiatives, practices, and policies is more than just a side effect – it has been positioned as pivotal in discussions of social justice, fairness, and discrimination related to educational policy (Carr, 2015). Motivational side effects may burden specific groups of people more heavily than others and such unfair distribution of motivational consequences can be positioned as structural discrimination (Carr, 2015).

In what follows I seek to map out and discuss the idea of dampened motivation as an educational side effect. To do this, I specifically employ the language of self-determination theory (SDT) as a comprehensive and contemporary theoretical framework for exploring and understanding motivation. SDT (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) has made a significant contribution to the development of our understanding about motivation in education and has offered a rich framework positing that social contextual conditions that support key human needs for feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are the basis for the development of intrinsic motivation, more self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation, and associated wellbeing.

A basic overview of SDT in education

SDT (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) is best described as a macro-theory of human motivation, integrating a range of issues such as personality development, self-regulation, global psychological needs, non-conscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behaviour, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). A central assumption is the idea that people are theorised to possess an innate curiosity, interest, and love of learning (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). However, a predilection towards such intrinsic interest, growth and actualisation by no means guarantees that people will attain it, and there are clear and identifiable social-contextual factors that have the potential to enhance or thwart its accomplishment. Hence, SDT views growth and integration as heavily dependent upon the social-contextual provision of key psychological nutriments necessary to nourish actualisation (Ryan & Deci, 2004).

Ryan and Deci (2000) assert that the psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are specifiable requirements, necessary for organisms to survive and thrive, and that withholding these needs tends to lead to a deterioration of growth and integrity. These human needs are a way of helping us articulate what is needed, in a psychological sense, for psychological health, well-being, and effective functioning. It is also important to understand how social contexts

such as education provide the conditions that help to satisfy or thwart these important psychological needs. Motivation, learning, empowerment, performance, and development are more likely when social contexts support people's ability to satisfy these needs (Deci et al., 1991). In brief, the three needs are outlined below:

Competence

The need for competence reflects the innate propensity to experience a sense of efficacy and confidence in one's interactions with the surrounding environment (e.g. White, 1959), stimulating individuals to seek out challenges and to enhance and develop their capacities. Learners are likely to feel competent when they are able to meet the challenges and demands placed upon them in the context of their schoolwork and education.

Autonomy

As Ryan and Deci (2004) have stressed, autonomy is the need for individuals to 'experience their behaviour as an expression of the self, such that, even when actions are influenced by outside sources, the actors concur with those influences, feeling both initiative and value with regard to them' (p. 8). Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that autonomy is satisfied when there is an internal perceived locus of causality (I-PLOC) and people feel as though they are both the origin and orchestrator of their behaviour.

Relatedness

The need for relatedness is closely tied to ideas (e.g. Bowlby, 1979/2005; Harlow, 1958) suggesting that humans have an inbuilt propensity to feel a psychological sense of connectedness and belonging to other human beings. This need reflects a deep-rooted desire to justify one's existence by feeling that one is integrated with and accepted by others.

The extent to which these basic needs are satisfied by given social contexts is a central component of SDT, linked to the direction and persistence with which individuals engage in goal-directed behaviour (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2007).

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the archetype of self-determined motivation. That is, intrinsically motivated activities 'are activities that people do naturally and spontaneously when they feel free to follow their inner interests' (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 234). Intrinsically motivated learners play, explore, and engage in activities purely for the pleasure derived from doing so; the activity is an end in itself. The maintenance and development of intrinsic motivation has been linked with satisfaction of the basic psychological needs (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2007) and SDT proposes that the basic needs are 'necessary conditions for the maintenance and enhancement of intrinsic motivation' (Ryan & Deci, 2007, p. 3).

In the context of education there have been numerous studies that have explored intrinsic motivation from an SDT perspective (see Deci et al., 1991; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Deci et al. (1981) explored elementary school teachers' reported orientations towards controlling children's behaviour versus supporting their autonomy. Results identified that children who were assigned to an autonomy-supportive teacher demonstrated superior levels of intrinsic motivation, perceived competence, and self-esteem over time. In American (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987) and Japanese (Kage & Namiki, 1990) schools intrinsic motivation and performance in relation to educational activities have consistently been positively linked to autonomy-supportive environments and dampened by evaluative pressures. Taylor et al. (2014) employed a meta-analysis of 18 international studies exploring the relationship between intrinsic motivation and educational attainment, along with a series of controlled longitudinal studies, and identified: (a) the important role of intrinsic motivation in facilitating school achievement, and (b) that intrinsic motivation was the only type of motivation to consistently positively relate to academic performance over a one-year period. Taylor et al. (2014)

concluded that their findings 'highlight the unique importance of intrinsic motivation for the future academic success of high school and college students' (p. 342). Niemiec and Ryan (2009) have contended that in educational research it is difficult to dispute the weight of the evidence supporting the claims: (a) that students tend to learn, develop, and perform better and more creatively when they are intrinsically motivated, and (b) that intrinsic motivation is best encouraged by an environment that supports autonomy, and is undermined by controlling contexts.

Extrinsic motivation and internalisation

Education, learning, and teaching are not always fun, pleasurable, and intrinsically satisfying. For example, not all young children are likely to find it intrinsically pleasurable to engage in the various assignments they are required to undertake as 'homework' each evening and many students frequently focus solely upon producing what is required to satisfy a particular grade specification and have little intrinsic interest in a given task. Clearly, beyond intrinsic motivation there are other types of behaviour regulation that underpin motivation in educational contexts. SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) proposes a motivational continuum that conceptualises different forms of motivation ranging from highly autonomous (i.e., 'pure' intrinsic motivation) to highly controlling (i.e., 'pure' extrinsic motivation). This continuum recognises that certain extrinsically motivated actions can become 'internally motivated' in the sense that they begin to serve internal rather than external goals (Ryan & Deci, 2007). *External regulation* is the least self-determined form of motivation and reflects a behaviour that is undertaken purely as the means to an external end, such as a specific reward or because of pressures from external sources. For example, a student might work on a piece of coursework purely to earn a particular grade or to avoid a particular punishment. The problem with external regulation is that the behaviour is unlikely to be maintained once the reward or punishment is no longer available (Niemiec and Ryan, 2009).

Next on the continuum is *introjected regulation*, which reflects behaviours that are carried out based upon self-imposed feelings of guilt or pressure, reflecting an internalised belief that one

'ought' to undertake a specific behaviour, not that they 'want' to (Wang et al., 2002). This motivational regulation moves beyond external regulation in the sense that it tends to reflect an *internalisation* of external pressures. This might involve a student striving to learn to avoid a sense of shame or to feel a sense of worthiness (Niemiec et al., 2008). A distinction between external and introjected regulation and more self-determined forms of motivation (such as intrinsic motivation) is the fact that they reflect an external perceived locus of control (E-PLOC) which originates from outside of the self. The behaviour is experienced as being *imposed* upon individuals, either by external forces or the self.

Identified regulation is a more self-determined form of motivation and reflects behaviours that are undertaken because individuals consider them to be valuable or important. For example, a student may engage in the reading material necessary for a clinical psychology assignment because they believe that understanding the material will be important for their future experiences in the profession (but *not* because it is intrinsically or inherently pleasurable to do so). *Identified regulation* is a more autonomous version of introjected regulation in the sense that the valued and important behaviour has been internalised and connected with core aspects of the self.

Again, there is a significant body of work in education that has explored the psychological and academic consequences of more autonomous motivational regulations and the environmental conditions necessary to support them. For example, Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci (1991) identified that elementary students who reported higher levels of the more autonomous regulations for learning were reported by their teachers as exhibiting higher attainment and adjustment in the classroom. Grolnick and Ryan (1987) showed that elementary school students with more autonomous forms of motivation towards doing schoolwork were more likely to evidence greater conceptual learning and deeper understanding of the material. They also found that asking elementary students to learn material in order to be tested on it resulted in dampened interest and decreased conceptual learning than did asking students to learn the material without mentioning a test (the test condition led to

short-term gains in rote recall that lasted less than a week). Furthermore, Niemiec et al. (2006) reported that high-school students who experienced more autonomous regulations towards school exhibited higher levels of positive well-being (e.g., life satisfaction) and lower levels of ill-being (e.g., depression).

In summary, self-determination theorists would assert that intrinsic motivation and autonomous forms of motivational regulation are essential if students are to maintain volition towards educational activities, learn better, and attain psychological well-being and personal growth. The theory has generated a substantial body of literature in support of this assertion. However, it is worth noting that SDT research is not without shortcomings (see Carr, 2015). For example, (a) there has been a significant reliance on a self-report paradigm that risks overlooking the nuanced experiences people may have of its key constructs, (b) a heavy reliance upon correlational survey-based research means that assumptions about causality should be interpreted with caution, and (c) like much psychological research (see Louis et al., 2014; Sugarman, 2015), the theory has been largely disconnected from broader critical issues of social justice and political conscience.

Dampened motivation as an educational side effect

Positioning dampened motivation as a side effect of specific educational interventions and practices necessitates a strong theoretical and empirical basis. Ryan and Weinstein (2009) have argued that SDT can provide this. In what follows, I attempt to use the language of SDT to articulate some important ways in which dampened motivation is a logical consequence of some cornerstones of contemporary educational policy.

Is aiming for equal educational achievement the right starting point?

It has been argued that neoliberal educational reform has helped to construct and cement the idea that a fair education system is one 'dedicated to raising the standards of all and facilitating greater access to higher education in order to arm the workforce with the credentials, knowledge

and skills that are valued in the global labour market' (Brown & Lauder, 2006, p. 28). Advocates of such discourse base their arguments around some fundamental points: (1) a need to increase educational and economic productivity in the face of a growing global market economy, (2) a need to reduce inequality in education by levelling out educational attainment, (3) a need to improve objectivity in educational assessment (to better measure whether attainment targets are being met), and (4) a need to hold schools and teachers accountable for ensuring the academic standards of their pupils (Hursh, 2005). Carl Hayden, New York Chancellor of Education (1996-2002), epitomized the idea that equal educational achievement is a critical goal when he suggested that:

> "The requirement that every child be brought to a Regents level of performance is revolutionary. It is a powerful lever for educational equity. It is changing for the better the life prospects of millions of young people, particularly poor and minority children who in the past would have been relegated to a low standards path. Too often, these children emerged from school without the skills and knowledge needed for success in an increasingly complex economy" (Hayden, 2001, p. 1).

There is a strong rationale for the political and social benefits of striving for equity in relation to educational achievement, typically conceptualized as the attainment of externally imposed objective standards to which schools, pupils, and families are held accountable. However, it is important to note that this meaning of achievement is (a) not a given, and (b) in direct conflict with other ideas about what achievement might mean. For Nicholls and Burton (1982), equality in relation to optimal motivation is a worthier goal than equality in relation to objective achievement. Over 30 years ago, in a paper titled *Motivation and Equality*, Nicholls and Burton (1982) highlighted the potential pitfalls of making equal achievement a primary educational goal:

> We start with the assumption that all students should develop their capacities to the fullest possible extent. If they did, we would have an acceptable form of equality in education. Individuals would be unequal in achievement but equal in the extent to which they had

> attained their potential. Equal educational *achievement* [emphasis added] is not desirable because it would mean inequality of fulfilment of potential. (p. 367)

What are the problems with prioritising equal educational achievement? For one thing, Nicholls and Burton (1982) argue that optimal motivation is by no means ensured by the attainment of equal achievement. That is, if we construct an education system where all children are required to reach an equal, externally-imposed level of achievement then it need not be the case that they will all reach and develop their potential to the fullest *or* develop optimal motivation. Experience, anecdotal evidence, and research data abound to suggest that (a) children can successfully meet and fulfil externally imposed achievement standards but still not reach or develop their intellectual capacities to the fullest, (b) children can successfully meet and fulfil externally imposed achievement standards but still not exhibit optimal motivation for learning, and (c) children can attempt but fail to meet externally imposed achievement standards and be motivationally and psychologically damaged in the process.

On the other hand, optimal motivation, they argue, is an essential ingredient of achieving equality in relation to the development of individual potential. That is, people cannot fulfil and develop their intellectual capacities to the fullest if they are not optimally motivated to do so. While it is impossible to say for certain that an individual has reached her full potential (Nicholls & Burton, 1982), optimal motivation in all children would certainly be an indicator that we were on track in working towards equality of fulfilment and development of potential. From this perspective, the aim of ensuring equality in relation to optimal motivation for learning would be a preferable educational starting point compared to the aim of ensuring equality in relation to objective achievement standards. As Nicholls and Burton (1982) suggested, if teachers can maintain optimal motivation in all children, "they will achieve a justifiable form of educational equality, and all children will develop their capacities to the fullest possible extent" (p. 368). As a starting point, striving for equal educational achievement is a goal that (a) neither requires nor necessitates the development of

optimal motivation in all learners (or teachers, for that matter), and (b) has led to the development of educational policy that has sought to "manufacture" educational equality by standardising achievement in a way that may also be fundamentally incompatible with optimal motivation. In what follows, I seek to discuss the ways in which this starting point creates a climate where dampened motivation is a highly plausible side effect.

High Stakes Testing: Does setting out to 'manufacture' equal educational achievement foster core practices incompatible with optimal motivation?

As education systems around the world have sought to standardise educational outcomes in line with the Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM), Gleeson and Gunter (2001) have suggested that this has turned schools and teachers into a 'technical workforce to be managed and controlled.' Conceptual and empirical evidence from SDT suggests that a system that values teachers' and learners' motivation, achievement, and wellbeing ought to carefully consider the extent to which it provides a platform that supports (and does not thwart) the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Deci et al. (1991) suggested that it is clear from SDT that the degree to which teachers' behaviour is experienced by pupils as autonomy-supportive has an important influence on the development of motivation and wellbeing. It is therefore important to understand factors that might predispose teachers to adopt autonomy-supportive behaviour. To this end, there is growing support for the idea that the external pressures placed upon teachers by contemporary educational policy may be problematic from a motivational perspective (e.g., Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009).

Roth et al. (2007) identified that Israeli teachers who felt more controlled in relation to their professional lives were consequently less autonomously-supportive towards their students. Pelletier et al. (2002) revealed that Canadian teachers who experienced more pressure from above (in the form of imposed curricula and pressure to meet performance targets in students) were less likely to be autonomy-supportive and more likely to be controlling towards students. Niemiec and Ryan

(2009) have suggested that: (a) teachers who feel pressured and controlled by policy are likely to experience dampened autonomy towards their work, resulting in motivational decrements that translate into lower levels of enthusiasm, energy, and creativity in the classroom to inspire and enthuse students, and (b) increasing pressure towards student attainment outcomes (to which teachers are increasingly held accountable) mean that extrinsic incentives such as grade specifications and externally imposed standards stifle possibilities for other more motivating teaching practices.

Advocates of high stakes testing policies (e.g., Finn, 1991) have argued that rewards and sanctions (at school, teacher, and pupil level) based upon test results are an example of an effective motivational technique grounded in classic behaviorist assumptions (Skinner, 1953). However, Ryan and Weinstein (2009) have argued that the fundamental distinction between high stakes testing policies and classic behaviorist principles is that behaviorism applies reinforcements to *behavior* whereas contemporary testing policies have tended to make rewards and sanctions contingent upon *outcomes* (e.g., school, teacher, or individual test results). Ryan and Brown (2005) identified that when outcomes alone are reinforced then it tends to be the case that *whatever* led to such outcomes is also reinforced and this has meant that both desirable (e.g., implementation of new teaching methods) *and* undesirable (e.g., teaching to the test, removal of low achievers from the pool) behaviors have been fostered.

Furthermore, a myopic focus on a carrot and stick approach to motivate schools, teachers, and pupils has ignored (and likely damaged) people's intrinsic interest. Ryan and Weinstein (2009) have outlined that when people's main motivation is a controlling system of rewards and sanctions, then they are likely to develop an extrinsic motivational focus and take the shortest route to the desired extrinsic end. Recent data have supported SDT's perspective on the connection between test-related grading and students' intrinsic motivation (e.g., Pulfrey et al., 2013). It has been suggested that there is a subtle but important distinction between (a) "being moved to act for the

fun or challenge…rather than because of external prods, pressures or rewards" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56) and (b) retrospectively reporting that one enjoyed an activity having just received a good grade. In a series of experiments, Pulfrey et al. (2013) reported that higher grades generated increased retrospective task enjoyment and interest via an injection of ego enhancement - but that studying for grades *per se* simultaneously reduced students' perceived task autonomy which adversely affected "intrinsic" motivation and continued engagement in the activity for its own sake.

If test results become the carrot then it is unsurprising that high stakes testing will incite excessive test preparation strategies, such as teaching to the test, a narrowing of the curriculum so that is focused solely upon test-relevant material, removing low achievers from the pool of test-takers, and micromanaging teaching environments. There are significant data to support these assumptions in high stakes testing environments, with evidence of all manner of unjust practices being fostered in the name of test results (e.g., Nichols & Berliner, 2007). Barksdale-Ladd and Thomas (2000) conducted in-depth interviews with 59 US teachers on high stakes testing. The teachers confirmed that in addition to encouraging a focus upon test-relevant teaching methods, high stakes testing had pushed them to discontinue or dramatically reduce highly valued learning activities such as silent reading, buddy reading and shared reading, collaborative writing and writing process, picnics, field trips, and classroom cooking.

What about "growth models?"

In the UK there has been lively debate among policy makers around how best to utilize high stakes testing. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) in the UK argued that they "...do not take issue with the *principle* of testing, but with the emphasis on published performance tables and the links between test results and inspection outcomes." This viewpoint suggests that the problem is not testing children per se but simply *how* the results and data generated are utilized. Accordingly, in the UK there has been a shift away from an overt emphasis on such testing, towards

an increased emphasis upon growth-oriented approaches designed to close the gap between actual and desired levels of individual performance.

At the heart of this shift in perspective has been a focus on the process-oriented notion of 'value added,' conceptualized as the difference between a statistically predicted (an 'expected' sequence of development) performance and actual performance. Based upon statistical analyses of the progressions of populations of actual children, a *likely-future* is predicted for each child *in relation to* his or her starting score. Similar to the US (e.g., Anderman, Anderman, Yough, & Gimbert, 2010), these value-added models have used two predominant approaches for calculating likely growth trajectories: (a) a regression line charting the 'average growth' of developmentally similar pupils is used as a template by which judgments of individuals' performance can be facilitated, or (b) growth trajectories are calculated for students demonstrating similar achievement at a given starting point (a reference group) and pupils can be judged according to whether they have made similar longitudinal progress to the reference group at a second point in time. Schools can be held accountable by parents and government to whether they achieve the 'likely-futures' calculated for their pupils. Furthermore, those teachers and schools that enhance individual development (over and above what may be predicted by normalized progression routes) would have generated 'value added.'

As Anderman et al. (2010) noted, shifting the focus of high stakes testing away from normative ranking systems to individual trajectories certainly seems like a move in the right direction. That is, it seems to be more in line with facilitating a mastery and growth orientation for both teachers and pupils. However, in a motivational sense, Benita et al. (2014) have discussed the critical distinction between the *aim* of a behavior (i.e., *what* one is trying to obtain) and the *reason* for the behavior (i.e., *why* one is trying to obtain it). Growth models of educational attainment have tended to ignore the reasons *why* individuals might be focused upon growth trajectories (Benita et al., 2014). It is possible, for example, to focus upon self-improvement because of a sense of external

pressure *or* out of a genuine sense of interest and personal autonomy. As Benita et al. (2014) have suggested,

> "People who are trying to do better than they did before (i.e., the aim of improving) may do so with concurrent rigidity and out of a sense of external or internal compulsion, or they may do so with a sense of choice and interest" (p. 260).

They identified that growth goals were more likely to result in positive emotions, interest, and enjoyment for students when they were pursued out of a genuine sense of autonomous choice, than when they felt pressured to do so. Hence, a focus on growth is unlikely to be motivationally beneficial *if* one feels that the aim is forced. Allen (2012) has suggested that the shift towards growth models of educational achievement may *suggest* a more pedagogically effective and empowering transformation but the subtext is that underneath, the same ideals prevail:

> "What retreats is simply the goad of ranking. In its place pupils learn how to enhance process and develop themselves in apparent harmony with one other, each of them involved in personal formative cycles, occupied in unison within individual feedback-action loops. They learn to become industrious self-enhancers, accepting and implementing external goals. Competition is humanised and disguised and perhaps thereby intensified by this formative technology." (p. 658)

Motivational discrimination as a side effect of contemporary educational policy

Dimensions of contemporary educational policy such as high stakes testing and accountability have been viewed by some authors as discriminatory. For example, standardized test scores in the US have been shown to correlate strongly with family income and a school's performance is often more a reflection of its average family income than of the quality of the teaching it provides. Hursh (2005) identified that 83% of the failing schools in New York were located in five major poor urban areas (i.e., New York City, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Yonkers). He

suggested that under the NCLB mandate these schools were often unfairly judged, penalized, and made scapegoats in relation to poor provision of education, when their achievement-related deficiencies were more likely connected to social class, ethnicity, and poverty as opposed to deficient teaching. Hence, certain groups and demographics may be unfairly penalized by such policies.

In the same vein, dampened motivation as a side effect of contemporary educational policy and practice may be a burden that is more heavily borne by certain groups of children. Ryan and Weinstein (2009) have argued that it is a major concern that a one-size-fits-all approach to assessment and educational outcomes has eroded pluralism in relation to teaching and learning. They have argued that an increasingly uniform approach to standards and curricula has meant that few students are optimally challenged or motivated. For gifted and talented children such an approach to education is frequently 'irrelevant, limiting, and boring' (p. 229), whereas students with language or learning barriers might often find it 'inappropriate or demoralising' (p. 229). From a motivational perspective, one of the central concerns about a one-size-fits-all approach to education is that certain populations of children and young people may be particularly disadvantaged.

Using the language of SDT, Rogers and Tannock's (2013) recent study examined the experiences of children with high versus low levels of ADHD symptoms in relation to perceived levels of basic need satisfaction in the classroom. A sample of Canadian children reported the extent to which they felt that their needs for autonomy (e.g., 'I can pretty much be myself in class'), relatedness (e.g., 'I feel that my teacher understands me'), and competence (e.g., 'I have been able to learn interesting skills in class') were supported in the classroom. Results indicated that the children in the ADHD group reported experiencing their classrooms as more controlling, feeling less valued and cared about by their teachers, and had higher levels of perceived incompetence in relation to learning. The authors discussed how the nature of contemporary Western classrooms requires children to engage with learning in a manner that is completely contrary to the nature of

children with ADHD characteristics, which may have a considerable impact on the extent to which such children are able to feel that their basic motivational needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) are supported (and/or the extent to which teachers feel able to provide for these needs). They argued that there is an urgent need to discuss such motivational deficits in relation to environmental nourishment of the basic psychological needs of children such as those with higher levels of ADHD characteristics.

Structural discrimination refers to policies and practices that are neutral in intent but which have differential and/or harmful effects or confer certain disadvantages on particular groups of people. While Rogers and Tannock's (2013) data could be viewed as further evidence of psychological 'deficits' in children with ADHD symptomology, it would be remiss to "individualize" such motivational deficits *without* considering other arguments. One possibility is that factors such as the lack of plurality and increasing rigidity fostered by policies such as high stakes testing (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009) structurally discriminate against certain children in a *motivational* sense.

By conceptualizing human motivation as fundamentally connected to basic human needs, growth, wellness, and actualization, SDT helps to position motivation as a construct that sits at the heart of social justice and fundamental human capabilities. It would not seem unreasonable to suggest that the opportunity to nourish one's basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) through education, to feel connected, effective, and agentic, to learn with enthusiasm and interest, so that growth, development, wellbeing, and actualization are possible, should be something that all human beings have a genuine possibility of enjoying. In this sense, optimal motivation for learning as conceptualized by SDT, could arguably be positioned as a fundamental human entitlement.

It is far beyond the scope of this paper to offer an exhaustive explication of social justice. What constitutes social justice is always contested, fluctuating according to time and space, and dependent upon historical juncture, social group, or spatial location (Carr, 2015; Vincent, 2003).

However, for Rawls (2003), social justice is about ensuring and protecting equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities, as well as caring for the least advantaged people in a society. From this perspective, whether something is just or unjust depends upon whether it advances or impedes equality of access to important civil liberties, human rights, and opportunities for healthy and fulfilling lives, as well as whether it allocates a fair share of benefits to the least advantaged people in society. Miller (2003) argues that 'when we attack some policy or some state of affairs as socially unjust, we are claiming that a person, or more usually a category of persons, enjoys fewer advantages than that person or group of persons ought to enjoy (or bears more of the burdens than they ought to bear), given how other members of the society in question are faring' (p. 1).

There have been numerous attempts (e.g., Doyal & Gough, 1991; Max-Neef et al., 1992; Nussbaum, 2003) by development scholars to identify and isolate the fundamental human needs, capabilities, or rights that would help to shape 'constitutional principles that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations' (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 5). For example, Nussbaum's (2003) list of central capabilities includes the idea that all human beings ought to be entitled to capabilities connected to the 'senses, imagination, and thought' (p. 41). That is, '…being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a 'truly human' way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training' (p. 41). For Nicholls and Burton (1982), education simply cannot adequately cultivate imagination, learning, thinking, reasoning, and understanding if it does not first set out to optimize motivation. Furthermore, education that systematically dampens motivation as a side effect of prioritising other goals could inadvertently impede such capabilities. In this sense, motivation might be positioned as inextricably connected to discussions about social justice in relation to fundamental human entitlements.

In *A Theory of Need*, Doyal and Gough (1991) claimed that 'universal needs exist…sets of basic and intermediate needs can be identified and degrees of need satisfaction can be charted' (p.

9), offering a guiding structure for the preconditions of what all humans should enjoy. Doyal and Gough (1991) do not go as far as to suggest that all human beings should be guaranteed wellbeing by societies or governments. Rather, they argue that there should be a commitment to securing what they see as the preconditions of wellbeing. To this end, the basic human needs of physical health and autonomy (the capacity to initiate an action through the formulation of one's own aims, desires, and beliefs) are positioned as pivotal. Hence, the basic psychological needs that SDT has positioned as so central to human motivation (and so fundamentally connected to growth, wellbeing, and actualisation) have, in various ways, been connected to discussions of what ought to be preserved and protected universally.

Aviram and Assor (2010) used SDT as a basis for defending the importance of autonomy as a fundamental human entitlement in a liberal democracy. They argued that '…if asked why commitment to autonomy is so important, the Millean liberal can come up with two categories of answers relating to social and political philosophy, or to ethics and psychology' (p. 119). The social-political reasons were (a) that without the cultivation of autonomy Liberal Democracy has no raison d'être, and (b) that without autonomy Liberal Democracy might be considered a democracy, but not a liberal one. The psycho-ethical reasons were (a) self-knowledge is the best guarantee for authentic self-expression, and (b) self-expression and self-direction are the best guarantees we have for promising people a satisfying life. Research in the realms of SDT has provided a wealth of evidence in support of the idea that seeking to foster human autonomy is an educational goal that aligns with the enhancement of human development, motivation and wellbeing, and this is a goal that many argue is a fundamental issue of social justice (Aviram & Assor, 2010).

Conclusion

This paper sought to outline how the lens of SDT facilitates an appreciation of how human motivation is inextricably connected to basic psychological needs that can be supported or thwarted by educational contexts. The theory also helps to illuminate the critical role that these needs play in

enabling people to develop self-determined forms of motivation and associated love for (and perceived value in) learning, positive wellbeing, achievement, and creativity. Appreciating motivation as such a broad construct, connected to cognitive, affective, emotional, and behavioral experiences, needs, and outcomes, reinforces the critical need to ensure that educational policy and practice is designed to help facilitate and protect self-determined motivation in teachers and learners. Furthermore, we might go as far as to suggest that structural issues in education that can be seen to dampen the key ingredients of human motivation in a systematic or discriminatory manner are fundamental issues of social justice.

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